

R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

**Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Standards**

2010 Revisions

Frequently Asked Questions



By act of the General Assembly in 1968, nursery schools and kindergartens were endorsed as the initial steps in early childhood education and were thereby made an integral part of the education system of Rhode Island. This act was the result of an upsurge of interest across the nation in offering planned educational opportunities to preschoolers; the establishment of an increasing number of facilities for children under six; and the demand by parents for a safe, healthy and acceptable places for their child to begin his/her educational experience. Thus, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) was authorized to plan for the approval of existing early childhood programs and to assume leadership in establishing of standards for new facilities. That is, by legislative act, namely, Chapter 48 of Title 16 of the General Laws of Rhode Island, the Commissioner was given responsibility for setting standards and planning approval procedures for educational programs serving children three to six years of age. In 2006, RIDE began revising the 1968 standards to establish standards and an approval process for early care and education programs which reflected the substantive advances in the field in defining what constitutes high-quality early childhood education.

## **What is the vision behind the new Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Standards approved by the Board of Regents?**

The new standards represent the ***Board of Regent's vision of high-quality, comprehensive early childhood education***. The standards ***align with national PreK benchmarks, research, and evidence-based practice*** shown to improve educational and developmental outcomes for children. The standards also incorporate a ***framework for providing high-quality educational services based on RI Early Learning Standards*** professional development which has been available annually at no cost since 2003.

The new standards represent one part of a ***continuum of early care and education which links DCYF Licensing to Bright Stars Quality Improvement to RIDE Approval*** and provides a clear path for programs which choose to invest in quality improvement. This coordinated system ***streamlines state agency efforts and reduces duplicative processes*** by aligning state work within areas of expertise. Also, a coordinated system of early care and education which includes preschools, child care, Head Start and public schools, aligns with the US Department of Education's vision for its federal early childhood investments.

The Regents and RIDE are ***committed to a mixed-delivery system of publicly funded PreK***. All sectors of the early care and education system are important partners in this work, and all need to meet the same high quality standards. RIDE recognizes that these standards represent high expectations for programs and that these expectations carry an associated cost. High-quality Pre-K costs about the same as first grade. It costs more than tuition at most state universities and colleges and is not affordable for many families. The funding formula proposal approved by the Regents illustrates the Regent's commitment to predictable, equitable funding for PreK programs.

## **What steps were involved in the development of the new standards?**

2006: In January of 2006, the Advisory Committee on Child Care and Development convened by the Department of Human Services (DHS) conducted a Best Practices in Child Care Licensing Forum. In response to this forum, DHS organized a ***Promoting Best Practices in Licensing Workgroup*** which began meeting in June to create and recommend long and short-term goals and action steps related to child care licensing. One of the overarching goals this group identified was a need to, ***"increase coordination and decrease duplication relevant to organizational structures, data management, interactions with service providers, and information to***

***stakeholders and the general public in the interests of advancing systemic solutions.***” Additionally, one of the action steps identified by this group in relation to another overarching goal was to, ***“Revise RIDE ECE program approval regulations to create criteria for identifying and approving a RI Early Learning Standards based PreK program. Coordinate these standards and process with DCYF certification and licensing and QRS.”***

2007: The RIDE process for revising the standards ***began with a Board of Regents Work Session*** where the vision for the revisions was designed. This vision incorporated the goals developed by the Promoting Best Practices in Licensing Workgroup. An early childhood team selected for their expertise in RI state systems, early childhood education, early childhood special education, early childhood monitoring/accreditation systems, research and evidence-based practice began developing the first draft in September of 2007. RIDE Approved programs were given verbal notice during monitoring visits that revisions were being drafted and that their input would be sought.

2008: In August, the ***initial draft was mailed to national experts*** for review and was posted on the RIDE website along with feedback forms. In September, ***a notice indicating the draft was posted and announcing the scheduling of two input forums was mailed to all RIDE Approved programs and all DCYF Licensed programs.*** The forums were held in October and November and written input was accepted through December.

In December 2008, the early childhood team met to review the local and national input received and draft the second version of the standards.

2009: In March, the draft standards were presented to the Board of Regents, and the Regents voted to release the standards for public comment. In May, ***public hearings were held and written comments were accepted.*** RIDE staff organized and reviewed the public comments received and made recommendations for revisions to the Regents during their December Work Session. In January 2010, the Regents voted to approve the standards. The ***draft standards have been posted on the RIDE Website since September of 2008*** and were only removed when the final standards were posted, and ***all notifications of public hearings and of Regents meetings regarding these standards were properly posted*** as well.

## **What is the difference between Tier1 Approval and Tier 2 Approval?**

Tier 1 Approval/Core Approval is the approval required in order to operate an early childhood program. Tier 2 Approval/Comprehensive Approval is the voluntary approval demonstrating compliance with the new standards.

The new standards correspond to Tier 2 Approval and are **voluntary** for all programs offering preschool programming and **required** for community-based kindergarten programs by July 1, 2011. The chart below outlines the required approval (***Tier 1/Core Approval***) for early childhood programs by program type:

<b>Program Type</b>	<b>Required Approval</b>	<b>Agency Responsible</b>
Community-based early childhood programs (preschools, child care, Head Start)	DCYF License	Department of Children, Youth, and Families
Public school programs	Compliance with the Basic Education Program (BEP) Regulations	RIDE
Private PK-12 school programs	Compliance with RIDE private school regulations	RIDE
Special Education School programs	Compliance with RIDE Special Education School regulations	RIDE

All of the above programs are eligible to apply for ***RIDE Approval as a Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program (Tier 2/Comprehensive Approval)***. RIDE Approval is voluntary for preschool programs.

Currently approved community-based early childhood programs who cannot demonstrate compliance with RIDE standards by July 2011 ***may continue to operate with a DCYF License*** (Tier 1/Core Approval). Community-based Kindergarten programs who cannot demonstrate compliance with the standards by July 2011 will not be approved for kindergarten programming for the 2011-2012 school year.

## **Why do community-based programs need to obtain a DCYF License?**

The new RIDE standards require DCYF Licensing for all community-based programs. ***DCYF regulations ensure that all community-based facilities and programs meet the same basic standards for health, safety, and educational programming.*** DCYF expertise in these areas is utilized in order to ensure that comprehensive educational

programming is built upon a solid foundation. Programs operating in ***public or private schools are subject to the health, safety, and educational requirements of their corresponding regulations***. In cases where higher basic standards apply to one group, but not another, and impact educational programming, additional standards pertaining to health, safety, and facilities were incorporated into the new Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Program Standards. Of the 197 programs holding RIDE Approval when the new standards were passed, 138 also held a valid DCYF License.

### **Why are community-based Kindergarten programs required to meet new standards when public schools are not?**

Public schools have a mandate to offer kindergarten programming. The regulations which govern public kindergarten programs are contained within the BEP regulations. Public schools who choose to distinguish their kindergarten programs as Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Programs may do so by seeking RIDE Approval. Community-based kindergarten programs are not mandated options and are required to demonstrate compliance with RIDE Approval by July 2011. Most RIDE Approval standards are consistent with BEP requirements. In the categories where RIDE Approval represents a higher standard, the decision to maintain the higher standard reflects a commitment to the best interests of children.

### **Why were the qualifications for teachers raised and how long do programs have to comply?**

The decision to require certified teachers in each RIDE Approved classroom reflects the following:

- Research relating teacher credentials to improved child outcomes,
- Research on PreK programs with certified teachers,
- PreK benchmarks,
- Knowledge, skills, and competencies required to implement the educational program,
- Alignment with K-12 system requirements, and
- Alignment with other national and state level efforts to raise credentials (NAEYC, Head Start, Bright Stars).

Staff employed in RIDE Approved programs in operation on January 7, 2010, have a period of time to demonstrate compliance with the standards pertaining to credentials. The timelines are different depending on the individual's role. Each program will be required to submit a corresponding action plan for each employee who does not meet the credential standards. Programs applying after January 7, 2010 are required to employ properly credentialed staff as a condition for RIDE Approval.

### **What are the new standards regarding class size and ratio?**

The changes to class size and teacher:child ratio are not significantly different from RIDE's original standards. The original standards capped class size at 15 for 3 year olds and 20 for 4 year olds. The new standards allow a maximum of 18 children ages three and four. This represents a decrease for classrooms serving four year olds and an increase for classrooms serving three year olds. DCYF Licensing allows classrooms of 4 year olds to include up to 20 children. RIDE standards represent a higher standard for preschool classrooms and align with national PreK benchmarks. The standards pertaining to preschool teacher:child ratio require a ratio of 1:9 and also align with national PreK benchmarks.

In kindergarten classrooms, RIDE's original standards capped class size at 25. The new standards specify a group size of 24 with a teacher:child ratio of 1:12. Most existing community-based kindergarten programs already operate with very small class sizes, a feature which makes them marketable in a state where kindergarten is provided at no cost by public schools.

### **Why are there changes in requirements for the physical facilities and classroom environment?**

The quality of the physical environment has a definite impact on the quality of educational programming. In the past, programs were "grandfathered" in and allowed to operate without complying fully with the existing standards. Programs that cannot demonstrate compliance with basic health, safety, and facilities regulations of DCYF by July 2011 will be required to secure suitable space in order to continue operating. Programs that cannot demonstrate compliance with basic standards for health and safety will be required to close. Additionally, RIDE will use the Early Childhood Environmental Rating scale (ECERS) to ensure that classroom environments meet high quality standards associated with improving child outcomes. Programs will need an average ECERS score of 5.0 or greater with no observed classrooms score less than 3.0. This standard aligns with the Five-Star rating in the Bright Stars Quality Rating and Improvement System.

## **What are the timeline and transition plans for implementing the new standards?**

Programs which held RIDE Approval or had started the Approval process on January 7, 2010, have until July 1, 2011 to demonstrate full compliance with the new standards. Programs seeking RIDE Approval after January 7, 2010, must demonstrate full compliance in order to receive RIDE Approval.

RIDE has developed a self-assessment for programs to complete to assist in determining their status in demonstrating compliance with the standards. For currently approved programs, this self-assessment will serve as the basis for the development of an action plan which will be submitted with a new application as part of the transition process. The action plan should ensure that full compliance is achievable by July 1, 2011.

In the spring of 2010, RIDE will conduct regional sessions for programs opting to transition to the new approval system. These sessions are designed to focus on individual sections of the new standards and will provide support to programs as they develop their action plans. As the new standards are implemented, RIDE is committed to identifying barriers to meeting the standards and to developing supports to programs and individuals so that all Rhode Island children will have access to a high quality, comprehensive early childhood program.